

Patent Application
Serial No.: 09/751268
Docket No.: 45060-00006USPX

In the Claims: Please delete claims 1 to 32 without prejudice and insert the following new claims 33 to 65:

CLAIMS:

33. A computer-implemented method for effecting replacement of equipment in an industrial plant which includes a process control system, comprising the steps of: using a first software application for controlling electronic procurement (e-procurement) operations to order replacement equipment for procurement from one or more suppliers; linking the first software application functionally with at least a second software application including a management function which represents and manages runtime operation data associated with said equipment; and initiating e-procurement operations through said at least one second software application.

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34. A method according to claim 33, wherein said at least one second software application comprises a reporting software function for reporting an operational status monitored during runtime of the industrial plant.

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35. A method according to claim 34, wherein said at least one second software application comprises a function for producing one or more of a production report, a quality report, and a cost of operation report.

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36. A method according to claim 33, wherein said at least one second software application comprises a control software function for controlling operational conditions relating to said equipment.

37. A method according to claim 33, wherein said at least one second software application comprises a graphical software function for producing a graphical runtime representation of said equipment in an operational context of said plant, said method including the step of accessing said management function for said runtime operational data.

38. A method according to claim 37, comprising the steps of:

a user selecting a presentation of a menu via said graphical runtime representation of said equipment;

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retrieving a specification which is stored, or generated on the basis of stored data, for said equipment; and procuring the replacement equipment according to at least part of said specification.

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39. A method according to claim 38, comprising providing said user with an option to alter said specification after the specification is retrieved.

40. A method according to claim 38, wherein said presentation is selected from graphical representation on a screen of any of:

a computer connected by a LAN network to the process control system;

a computer connected by a Wan network to the process control system;

a computer connected by a telephone network to the process control system;

a computer connected by a short range radio link to the process control system;

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a mobile telephone connected by a telephone network to the process control system; and

a mobile telephone connected by a short range radio link to the process control system.

41. A method according to claim 38, comprising providing said user with confirmation data once a preferred replacement has been identified, and said user selecting an option to execute a purchase of said replacement equipment.

42. A method according to claim 33, wherein said e-procurement operations comprise the steps of requesting, via a data communications network, a plurality of proposals for supply from a plurality of different suppliers, and selecting a preferred replacement from said proposals.

43. A method according to claim 33, wherein said e-procurement operations comprise the step of requesting an approval for a purchase of a predetermined value from a person or process having authority to give approval to make said purchase.

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44. A method according to claim 42, wherein said e-procurement operations comprise the step of requesting an approval for a purchase of a predetermined value from a person or process having authority to give approval to make said purchase.

45. A method according to claim including the step of 33, initiating said e-procurement operations to occur automatically in response to operational status data associated with said equipment and received from said at least one second software application.

46. A method according to claim 33, comprising of the steps of:

examining one or more prices and conditions retrieved in the e-procurement operations;

forming a negative buying decision;

changing at least one part of the replacement equipment specification to initiate a modified e-procurement process;

examining one or more new prices and conditions retrieved in the modified e-procurement process; and

transmitting a purchase confirmation to an identified preferred supplier.

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47. A method according to claim 42, comprising the steps of:
examining one or more prices and conditions retrieved in the e-procurement operation;
forming a negative buying decision;
changing at least one part of the replacement equipment specification to initiate a modified e-procurement process;
examining one or more new prices and conditions retrieved in the modified e-procurement process, and
transmitting a purchase confirmation to an identified preferred supplier.

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48. A method according to claim 38, comprising the steps of:

performing iterations of cost evaluation of the specification in which specification factors or parameters are changed; and

judging each evaluation result in accordance with a predefined algorithm, to finalize an e-procurement process.

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49. An automated procurement system for ordering replacement equipment for an industrial plant, said system including means for transmitting information including a specification for said equipment and a means for communication with suppliers over a network, wherein the system comprises:

a first software application for conducting e-procurement operations whereby one or more items of replacement equipment may be procured from one or more suppliers, said automated procurement system including at least a second software which is functionally linked with said first software application, said second software application being connected for managing runtime operational data associated with said equipment, such that e-procurement operations may be initiated via said at least one second software application.

50. An automated procurement system according to claim 49, wherein the system includes means for communicating the specification for said replacement equipment to one or more manufacturers or suppliers for ordering replacement equipment or related service thereof.

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51. A procurement system according to claim 49, comprising software means to match a registered or identified logged-in prospective customer to a history of details of specification selection, and subsequent changes to specification stored in a database of the system.

52. A procurement system according to claim 49, comprising software means to match a registered or identified logged-in prospective customer to a history of details of specification selection comprising digital identifier means such as a cookie stored in a computer used by the prospective customer.

53. A computer program code element, comprising computer code means or software code portions for enabling a computer or a processor to carry out the steps of a method according to claim 1.

54. A computer program code element, comprising computer code means or software code portions for enabling a computer or a processor to retrieve information about equipment which

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needs replaced in an industrial plant, whereby said computer or processor carries out actions to:

- receive information from a database which includes replacement equipment specification;
- receive input identifying a parameter relating to delivery times for the equipment; and
- conduct electronic procurement operation to obtain at least one quote for a given specification and delivery time.

55. The computer program code element of claim 54, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise software means enabling a user to:

- change at least one parameter relating to the replacement equipment specification to result in a new specification,
- initiate electronic procurement operations to obtain at least one quote for the new specification.

56. The computer program code element of claim 55, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise software means enabling a user to:

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-repeatedly change at least one parameter relating to the replacement equipment specification,

-carry out repeated electronic procurement operations for the new specification until a received quote indicates a financial cost which is equal to or less than a predetermined target cost.

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57. The computer program code element of claim 55, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise software means enabling a user to:

-repeatedly change at least one parameter relating to the replacement equipment specification,

-carry out repeated e-procurement operations for the new specification until the received quote indicates a delivery date which is the same as or earlier than a predetermined target date.

58. The computer program code element as in claim 55, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise software means enabling a user to communicate a buying decision, based on one or more prices and conditions

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resulting from the electronic procurement operations for a selected specification, by means of a single action by the user.

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59. The computer program code element as in claim 58, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise software means to communicate a decision to by replacement equipment as a purchase order to a selected manufacturer or distributor.

60. The computer program code element as in claim 59, wherein the computer code means or software code portions comprise executable parts formed and written as one or more object oriented programs.

61. A computer program contained in a computer readable medium, comprising computer program code means to make compute or processor carry out the steps of a method according to claim 1.

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62. A computer data signal embodied for communication in a computerised system, the communication being associated with replacement of equipment in an industrial plant which includes a process control system, wherein the data signal comprises information derived from a maintenance specification representing said equipment in a software application for conducting runtime maintenance of said equipment in the control system.

63. A computer data signal as in claim 62, wherein the communication comprises at least one part identifying the equipment and one part identifying a desired delivery date or date range.

64. A method of generating a computer data signal as claimed in claim 62, wherein the computer data signal is generated in an automatic replenishment procedure of the computerised system, on the basis of an event trigger stored in the computerised system.

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65. A method of generating a computer data signal as claimed in claim 62, wherein the computer data signal is generated by an operator of the computerised system during runtime maintenance operations for said industrial plant.

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